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ABSTRACT

The relationship between parental personality traits and how parents socialize their children's emotions is largely unexplored. This study examined the association of personality traits such as Neuroticism and Agreeableness, and emotion traits such as Anxiety and Trait Depression to the strategies parents use to socialize their children's sadness, as well as how these personality and emotion traits and socialization methods relate to adolescents' experiences of sadness. The sample included 110 adolescents (51 females), ranging in age from 11 to 16, and their parents. Measures included parent and youth reports on emotion socialization, measures of parental personality and emotion traits, and checklists on adolescent sadness. Findings indicated that mothers' personality and emotion traits were related to their perceptions of how they socialized sadness in their youth. Fathers' traits were related to their perceptions of socialization, but to a lesser degree than mothers'. Specifically, maternal Neuroticism, Anxiety, and Trait Depression were related to negative strategies of socializing sadness, while maternal Agreeableness was correlated with positive socialization strategies. Parents' personality and emotion traits did not correlate with adolescents' perceptions of parents' socialization of sadness. Maternal personality and strategies of socializing sadness were associated with adolescents' experiences of internalizing problems and sadness, as reported by both mothers and youth. Specifically, mothers who were high in Neuroticism had adolescents who experienced more sadness. Mothers who used more Punishing and Magnifying or fewer Reward or Overriding strategies for socializing sadness had adolescents who experienced more internalizing problems and sadness. In addition, youth reports of parental socialization were associated with adolescents' experiences of internalizing problems and positive mood traits, as reported by both adolescents and their fathers. (Author/HTH)

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Parental Personality and its Relationship to Socialization of Sadness in Children

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We would like to acknowledge the collaboration and support of Carolyn Zahn-Waxler on this project.

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Eleanor Race

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Abstract

The relationship between parental personality traits and how parents socialize their children's emotions is largely unexplored. This study examined the association of personality traits such as Neuroticism and Agreeableness, and emotion traits such as Anxiety and Trait Depression to the strategies parents use to socialize their children's sadness, as well as how these personality and emotion traits and socialization methods relate to adolescents' experiences of sadness. The sample included 110 adolescents (51 females) ranging in age from 11 to 16 and their parents.

Mothers' personality and emotion traits were related to their perceptions of how they socialized sadness in their youth. Fathers' traits were related to their perceptions of socialization, but to a lesser degree than mothers'. Specifically, maternal Neuroticism, Anxiety, and Trait Depression were related to negative strategies of socializing sadness, while maternal Agreeableness was correlated with positive socialization strategies. Parents' personality and emotion traits did not correlate with adolescents' perceptions of parents' socialization of sadness.

Maternal personality and strategies of socializing sadness were associated with adolescents' experiences of internalizing problems and sadness, as reported by both mothers and youth. Specifically, mothers who were high in Neuroticism had adolescents who experienced more sadness. Mothers who used more Punishing and Magnifying or fewer Reward or Overriding strategies for socializing sadness had adolescents who experienced more internalizing problems and sadness. In addition, youth reports of parental socialization were associated with adolescents' experiences of internalizing problems and positive mood traits, as reported by both adolescents and their fathers.

Introduction

The methods parents use to socialize their children's expressions of emotion have garnered recent interest. Parental socialization of children's emotions plays a significant role in children's development (Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad, 1998). Most of the research has focused directly on the outcomes of socialization, with little consideration of parental characteristics that influence socialization techniques. Moreover, few studies have examined both maternal and paternal socialization of emotion.

Parental personality is related both to general parenting and to the experience and expression of emotion. For example, parents high in Neuroticism have been shown to display more negative parenting techniques, while parents high in Agreeableness tend to use more positive strategies (Belsky, Crnic, and Woodworth, 1995; Clark, Kochanska, and Ready, 2000). In addition, people high in Neuroticism and Anxiety react more negatively to their own emotions, while people high in Agreeableness tend to be able to cope with their negative emotions more effectively (Kokkonen and Pulkkinen, 2001; Laghai and Joseph, 2000).

Thus, we explored the relationships of parental personality traits (Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Openness) and emotion traits (Anxiety, Trait Depression and Positive Mood Traits) with parental socialization of sadness in their adolescents. In addition we examined how these personality traits, emotion traits, and methods of socializing sadness relate to adolescents' actual experiences of sadness. We also considered how the relationship between personality and socialization of sadness differs for mothers and fathers, and how this relationship differs based on both parent and adolescent perceptions of socialization.

Method

Participants

- 110 adolescents (51 females)
- Mean Age = 13 years
- Ethnicity
  - 74.5% Caucasian
  - 14.5% African-American
  - 10.9% Other
- Mean Hollingshead = 51.8, SD = 11.2

Measures

- **Emotion Socialization**

  The Response to Children's Emotions (parent report) and the Emotion Socialization Measure (youth report) (based on Emotions as a Child; Magai, 1996) were used to obtain parent and adolescent ratings of methods of socializing children's emotions. Scales used include Reward (discuss/comfort/ empathize), Override (distract/tell to cheer up), Punish (discourage emotion), and Magnify (escalate/show same emotion).

- **Parental Personality and Emotion Traits**

  - The NEO-Five Factor Inventory-Personality Inventory (NEO-FFI-PI; Costa and McCrae, 1992) was used to measure the personality traits of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness.
  - The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI; Spielberger, 1983) trait scale was used to measure parental Trait Anxiety.

- The State-Trait Depression Adjective Check List (ST-DACL; Lubin, 1994) was used to measure parental Trait Depression and Positive Mood Traits.

♦ Adolescent Sadness

- The Sad Adjective Checklist (SACL), adapted from the State-Trait Depression Adjective Checklist (Lubin, 1994) for use with children and adolescents, was used to measure youth trait negative and positive mood.
- The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991a), internalizing scale was used to measure youth levels of internalizing symptoms.

Findings

♦ Correlation between Parental Personality and Emotion Traits and Socialization of Adolescents' Sadness (Tables 1 and 2)

- Mothers higher in Neuroticism were more likely to use Punishing, Magnifying, and Overriding strategies, and less likely to use Rewarding strategies (see Table 1).
- Mothers with higher levels of Agreeableness were less likely to use negative strategies such as Punish and Magnify, and also less likely to override adolescents' sadness (see Table 1).
- Higher levels of paternal Openness were related to less use of Punish as a strategy for socializing sadness as reported by fathers (see Table 1).
- Mothers with higher levels of Anxiety and Trait Depression were more likely to punish and magnify their adolescents' expressions of sadness. Mothers with high levels of Anxiety were also less likely to reward adolescents' sadness (see Table 2).
- Fathers with more Positive Mood Traits were less likely to use Rewarding or Overriding strategies to respond to adolescents' sadness (See Table 2).
- Parental personality and emotion traits were unrelated to adolescents' perceptions of parental socialization.

♦ Adolescent Sadness and Internalizing Problems, Parental Socialization of Sadness, and Parental Personality and Emotion Traits (Tables 3, 4, and 5)

- To examine how parental socialization strategies and personality were associated with adolescents' experience of sadness, a hierarchical linear regression was

performed entering parental socialization strategies in the first step, and parental personality variables in the second step. Regressions were performed one at a time with the outcome variables of mother and father report of youths' internalizing symptoms and youth report of Trait Depression and Positive Mood Traits. Only significant models will be reported here.

- **Maternal reports of socialization and maternal personality were associated with maternal reports of adolescents' internalizing problems and youth reports of Trait Depression. Specifically, mothers who used more Punish and Magnify strategies, and mothers high in Neuroticism were more likely to report greater adolescent internalizing problems, and mothers who used more Reward and Override had adolescents who reported less Trait Depression (See Table 3 and Table 4).**

- **Paternal reports of socialization and paternal personality were not related to any reports of adolescents' experience of Trait Depression or internalizing problems.**

- **Adolescents who reported more maternal Override of sadness had less Trait Depression. Also, those whose mothers were higher on Neuroticism reported more Trait Depression (See Table 5).**

- **Adolescents' reports of paternal socialization of sadness were associated with paternal reports of youths' internalizing problems ($R^2 = .21$, $F(8,66) = 2.25$, $p<.05$) and youth reports of Positive Mood Traits ($R^2 = .21$, $F(8,66) = 2.21$, $p<.05$). However, none of the individual personality or emotion traits or socialization strategies was significantly related to youths' internalizing problems or positive mood.**

Table 1

Correlations between Parental Personality and Socialization of Sadness
*$p \leq .05$ **$p \leq .01$

	Socialization Strategies							
	Mother's Report				Father's Report			
Personality	Reward	Punish	Override	Magnify	Reward	Punish	Override	Magnify
Neuroticism	-.22*	.35**	.21*	.35**	-.12	-.20	-.01	.11
Extraversion	.19	-.18	-.01	-.07	.14	.05	.17	-.11
Openness	.03	-.02	-.15	-.03	.05	-.30**	-.20	-.02
Agreeableness	.10	-.20*	-.36**	-.27**	.17	-.11	.07	-.02
Conscientiousness	.20*	-.13	-.05	-.04	.17	.06	.07	-.10

Table 2

Correlations between Parental Emotion Traits of Anxiety, Positive Mood Traits, and Trait Depression and Socialization of Sadness

	Emotion Socialization Strategies							
	Mother				Father			
	Reward	Punish	Override	Magnify	Reward	Punish	Override	Magnify
Trait Anxiety	-.25**	.38**	.16	.24*	-.08	-.18	-.01	.11
Positive Mood Traits	-.23*	.14	-.03	.16	-.27*	-.18	-.42**	-.08
Trait Depression	-.08	.20*	.14	.28**	-.07	.09	-.05	.03

*$p \leq .05$ **$p \leq .01$

Table 3

Multiple Regressions of Maternal Reports of Socialization of Sadness and Maternal Personality on Adolescents' Internalizing Problems (Mother CBCL Internalizing Scale as Outcome)

Step	Independent Variables	Beta	R^2	F
1.	Reward	-.07		
	Punish	.30**		
	Override	-.08		
	Magnify	.27**	.21	6.96**
2.	Reward	-.01		
	Punish	.21*		
	Override	-.08		
	Magnify	.14		
	Neuroticism	.34**		
	Agreeableness	.04		
	Negative Mood Traits	.17		
	Positive Mood Traits	.04	.37	7.35**

*$p \leq .05$ **$p \leq .01$
N = 108

Table 4

Multiple Regression of Maternal Reports of Socialization of Sadness and Maternal Personality on Adolescents' Experience of Sadness (Child SACL Trait Depression as Outcome)

Step	Independent Variables	Beta	R^2	F
1.	Reward	-.23*		
	Punish	.09		
	Override	-.22*		
	Magnify	.13	.11	3.09*
2.	Reward	-.20*		
	Punish	.08		
	Override	-.27*		
	Magnify	.09		
	Neuroticism	.09		
	Agreeableness	-.19		
	Negative Mood Traits	-.07		
	Positive Mood Traits	.02	.15	2.07*

*$p \leq .05$ **$p \leq .01$
N = 107

Table 5

Multiple Regression of Adolescent Reports of Maternal Socialization of Sadness and Maternal Personality on Adolescents' Experience of Sadness (SACL Trait Depression as Outcome)

Step	Independent Variables	Beta	R^2	F
1.	Reward	-.03		
	Punish	.12		
	Override	-.29*		
	Magnify	-.02	.11	2.97*
2.	Reward	.00		
	Punish	.12		
	Override	-.35**		
	Magnify	-.04		
	Neuroticism	.23*		
	Agreeableness	-.08		
	Negative Mood Traits	-.15		
	Positive Mood Traits	.12	.18	2.65*

*$p \leq .05$ **$p \leq .05$
N = 104

Discussion

This study was the first to examine the roles of parental personality and emotion traits in terms of how parents socialize emotions. Indeed, parental personality and emotion traits were related to how parents socialize sadness in their adolescents. Mothers high in Neuroticism used fewer positive and more negative strategies, while mothers high on Agreeableness used fewer negative strategies. Mothers high on Trait Depression and Anxiety were less likely to use positive strategies and more likely to use negative strategies. These findings are consistent with previous research which suggests that personality traits of Neuroticism and Anxiety are related to less tolerance of negative emotions and more negative styles of parenting, while traits such as Agreeableness are related to more positive styles of parenting and acceptance of negative emotion (Belsky, Crnic, and Woodworth, 1995; Clark, Kochanska, and Ready, 2000; Kokkonen and Pulkkinen, 2001; Laghai and Joseph, 2000).

Paternal personality had less of an association with socialization of sadness, as only paternal Openness and Positive Mood Traits related to socialization. Links between parental personality and socialization of sadness were more consistent for maternal reports than paternal reports, perhaps because mothers are the primary socializers of sadness. Additionally, personality may more readily spill over into parenting for mothers than fathers. It is also possible that adolescents express more emotion in front of their mothers, giving them more opportunity to socialize emotions. This finding may also not be unique to sadness, but to socialization of emotions in general.

Additionally, both maternal personality and socialization strategies were associated with internalizing problems and Trait Depression experienced by adolescents, both as reported by mothers and youth. Specifically, higher amounts of Neuroticism, greater use of Punishing and Magnifying strategies, and less use of Rewarding or Overriding strategies were associated with greater youth internalizing problems and Trait Depression. These findings suggest that adolescents whose mothers use more negative strategies to respond to their sadness may become over-expressive of this emotion. On the other hand, it may be adaptive for mothers to encourage their adolescents to express emotion, as this may relate to less adolescent experience of sadness. Overriding emotions, especially in combination with Reward, may also be adaptive, as mothers encourage their adolescent to express the emotion and then help them to distract themselves and not prolong their experience of that emotion. However, when used alone, Override could be a more negative socialization strategy, as it might appear dismissive of the emotion.

In conclusion, parental personality and emotion traits and methods of socialization, particularly maternal traits and socialization strategies, were associated with children's own experiences of sadness. Given the exploratory nature of this study, results are preliminary. Future research continues to explore the relationships between parental personality, socialization of emotion, and adolescent experience of emotion, including anxiety and anger.

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